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The City of San Jose apologizes for anti-Chinese Xenophobia: Chinatown burned down in 1887, so that history should not repeat itself

BY Dong Liu, SEPTEMBER 30, 2021, The Paper

On September 28 local time, San Jose of California formally apologized for the city's historical mistakes against the Chinese immigrants. On May 4, 1887, the city's Chinatown was deliberately burned by fire, and more than 1,400 people were displaced as a result.

More than a century later, the San Jose City Council finally unanimously passed a resolution to apologize to Chinese immigrants and their descendants for the city's role in "racism, xenophobia, and discrimination." San Jose currently has a population of more than 1 million, and it has become the largest city in the U.S. that issued a formal apology for the unequal treatment of Chinese people that year.

According to Fox News, San Jose mayor Sam Liccardo said: "Members of the Chinese-American community should know that their ancestors suffered from oppression due to race and inequality and that people have seen them today. Injustice has been encountered."

Connie Young Yu, a Chinese historian who wrote the "San Jose Chinatown", told The Paper (www.thepaper.cn) that her grandfather was a victim of the fire that year, and the official apology brought her "a huge reconciliation." And a sense of peace".

From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, San Jose has been the city with the second-largest Chinese population in California, second only to San Francisco. After the "gold rush" started in California in 1848, groups of Chinese came here. In addition to

becoming the lowest level of gold diggers, they also engaged in various jobs such as logging and railway construction. Since 1862, tens of thousands of Chinese have participated in the construction of the western part of the Pacific Railway, the world's first transcontinental railway in the United States.

As the "gold rush" gradually receded and job competition became more and more fierce, Chinese workers were increasingly hated by white laborers because of cheap labor. In the 1870s, after the American Civil War, the economy was in recession. Some politicians politicized anti-China hatred. They accused China of "coolies" for causing low wages. Public opinion and laws at the time also demonized Chinese workers and immigrants from Asia in various forms.

In a cartoon published in the American "Hornet Magazine" on March 3, 1882, the Chinese were portrayed as a hideous multi-handed monster, doing various jobs, while the American teenager on the right side of the screen was doing nothing. This was an attack on the Chinese and claimed they robbed the whites of their jobs.

In 1879, California passed a bill that specifically authorized the state government to determine who has the right to live in the state and prohibited companies and state, county, or city governments from hiring Chinese. In 1882, the US federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which is one of the most significant restrictions on free immigration in US history and the only discriminatory immigration law targeting specific ethnicities in US history.

After the "Chinese Exclusion Act" was passed, it brought endless disasters to Chinese workers. The city of San Jose adopted a series of policies and measures against the Chinese, which directly caused the local Chinese immigrants to suffer severe racial discrimination and violence. In March 1887, the City of San Jose issued a decree declaring Chinatown to be a "public hazard" and demanding its demolition. In May, Chinatown was burned down deliberately by fire.

Looking back at this period of history, San Jose City Councilmember Raul Peralez, who initiated this apology, said that the closure of Chinatown was a decision made by the San Jose City Government at the time and led to its final burning. "This decision is very racist." Peralez said bluntly that the government at the time was undoubtedly discriminating and persecuting the Chinese.

Why do you want to launch an apology now? Perarez said that he hopes that this move will help solve the racial discrimination that is taking place today. He himself saw that after the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic last year, incidents of discrimination and hatred against Asians in the United States increased, and this also occurred in San Jose.

"What can the city government do to curb Asian hatred?" Perarez said, launching the campaign is to "warn us not to let history repeat itself." Perarez said, "Racist sentiment is currently rising in some states in the United States. In fact, the social division and racism in the U.S. have become more serious in the past four years."

A new statement issued by the Committee of 100, a well-known Chinese organization in the U.S. said: "Committee of 100 congratulates the decision by the San Jose City Council to pass the resolution to publicly admit the city's role during the 19th and 20th centuries in encouraging and enabling racism and violence toward Chinese and Asian Americans. For nearly two centuries, Chinese Americans and the AAPI community overall have had to deal with racism, xenophobia, violence in the United States - issues that continue to this day. This is a step in the right direction and a teaching moment, allowing the city of San Jose and the nation to continue to learn and heal from the errors of the past."

San Jose's action is the latest in recognizing the racial intolerance that early Asian immigrants faced in seeking a life in America. Earlier this year, in May, 2021, the city of Antioch, California, passed a similar resolution apologizing for forcibly driving out Chinese residents out of town in 1876. The city of Vancouver B.C. apologized to its Chinese citizens in 2018 for its "legalized racism." (END)

